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State without Leadership: Leadership Emergence in Somalia Violent conflict

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The Conflicts in African Great Lakes Region and its Impact on the Good Governance

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State without Leadership: Leadership Emergence in Somalia Violent conflict

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Abstract

The case of Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, former president of Somalia's Transition federal government (TFG), attests the fact that leadership emerges from a process that involves interplay between the leader, followers and the context. Sheikh Sharif was an effective leader when he dynamically and organically emerged as Islamic courts union (ICU) chairman through a leadership process that developed within a context of desperation and anarchy after his relationship with followers was built over time. But when he was imposed by the international community as the leader of the TFG, the leadership process was interfered with and in place emerged a leader-centered vision and resultant opposition from the Somali people or followers. This paper demonstrates that imposed leadership is bound to fail as was the case with Ahmed Sharif when the international community made him the president of the Transition Federal Government of Somalia. In this case the leadership process had not developed organically. This paper affirms the fact that effective leadership emerges normally from a situation of need as was experienced in Somalia following the country's descend into chaos, insecurity and lack of leadership .

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مستخلص

توثق حالة شيخ شريف احمد شريف، الرئيس السابق للحكومة الصومالية الفيدرالية الإنتقالية، لحقيقة أن القيادة تبرز من العلاقة التي تربط بين القائد، الأتباع والبيئة الفكرية والسياسية. يعتبر شيخ شريف قائد نافذ وحقيقى خاصة عندما أسس وترأس إتحاد المحاكم الإسلامية، عبر إجراءات القيادة والتسلسل القيادى وتأسيس و تطوير علاقته مع إتباعه عبر الزمن. لكن عندما تم فرضه من قبل المجتمع الدولى كرئيس للحكومة الصومالية الفيدرالية الإنتقالية، تأثر أسلوبه فى القيادة وبروز رؤية إحادية ومركزية فى توجهاته مما قاد الى معارضته من قبل الصوماليين وايضاً أتباعه. هذه الورقة تبرز كيف أن القيادات المفروضة على الشعوب ستفشى بكل تأكيد كما هو فى حالة احمد شريف الذى فرضه المجتمع الدولى رئيساً للحكومة الفيدرالية الإنتقالية فى الصومال. ففى هذه الحالة نجد ان إجراءات القيادة وتسلسلها لم تكن متدرجة وطبيعية. تؤكد هذه الورقة على حقيقة أن القيادة الفعلية والنافذة تبرز طبيعياً حسب الوضع والحاجة كما فى التجربة الصومالية خاصة بعد إنحدار القطر فى الفوضى، عدم الأمن وغياب القيادة الرشيدة.

Introduction:

The search for a central and stable government in Somalia has also meant different dynamics for leadership. Of interest to this essay is the period immediately after the collapse of Somalia government in 1991 when a leadership vacuum created anarchy and insecurity. It is during this period that some form of leadership emerged through the Islamic Union Courts (IUC). This paper uses the Somalia case study to examine a situation of anarchy and the leadership response to the situation. In so doing the essay discusses leadership and the leadership process within this context .

The case of Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, former president of Somalia's TFG, attests the fact that leadership emerges from a process that involves interplay between the leader, followers and the context. Indeed this case reveals that imposed leadership is bound to fail. After the collapse of Said Barre's regime, Somalia plunged into anarchy. Several external interventions failed to restore order. It was until leadership emerged in the name of Sheikh Sharif that relative order was restored. The ICU under the chairmanship of Sheikh Sharif brought order and became the only resort of authority at a time when Somalis in Mogadishu City were in despair. However, later after Sheikh Sharif became the president of TFG, a government or administration propped by the international community, he became an imposed leader, thus losing touch and favor of the followers. His leadership and in particular the vision became at variance with the follower's goals; hence his unpopularity and final exit .

In sum, Sheikh Sharif was an effective leader when he dynamically and organically emerged through a leadership process that developed within a context of desperation and anarchy after his relationship with followers was built over time. The outcome of his vision was order, qualitative sanitation of the City, eliminating organized crime, street rape and offering much needed justice system in the name of ICU. But when he was imposed by the international community as the leader of the TFG, the leadership process was interfered with and in place emerged a leader-centred vision and resultant opposition from the

Somali people or followers. The vision of President Sharif was no longer geared towards creating order, eliminating organized urban crime nor generally overcoming anarchy, but was now focused on fighting terrorism or Al-shabaab group in line with the intentions of the international community.

Accordingly, this essay is divided into four parts. First, the introductory discussion reveals the Somalia situation, the key issues involved and the goals of the society. Before then the introductory part will examine the concept of leadership; its definition and evolving debates around leaders and leadership. Secondly, the essay examines how Sheikh Ahmed emerged as a leader of IUC in the informal context of anarchy in Somalia. Thirdly, analysis is dedicated to the leadership process where discussions center on the interactions between the leader of IUC and the people of Somalia to achieve the goals. The fourth part looks at the outcomes or results of IUC's response to Somalia anarchy. The conclusion reflects the whole issue of leadership emergence, leadership process and outcomes .

Leaders and Leadership: evolving debates and definition

To begin with, it is useful to examine the definition and explanation of the leadership concept. However, a review of the literature on leadership reveals that there are as many definitions of leadership as there have been authors who have written about the concept.

Broadly speaking, leadership has been viewed in two categories: leadership as a psychological or sociological phenomenon. Those who view leadership as psychological phenomenon, emphasize the view that leadership is embedded in the traits of the individual, that is, a leader is a person who possesses certain desirable personality and demographic traits. ⁽¹⁾ This points to the common statement that leaders are born.

On the other hand, proponents of leadership as a sociological phenomenon argue that leadership is a function of the whole situation and not something that resides in a person. ⁽²⁾ Therefore, from a sociological perspective, which this paper largely adopts, leadership is an interplay and relationship between the leader and followers-within a particular context. Thus, leadership is the result of a confluence of a

person, a group and the needs arising from a situation faced by each.⁽³⁾ This sociological debate is progressively gaining application as the emphasis on personal traits yields ground to emphasis on leadership as a process.

At the outset, the study of leadership started with the assumption that it was a phenomenon embedded in the leader, rather than within the follower and/or the relationship that brings and holds them together.⁽⁴⁾ Accordingly, the leadership literature was largely leader centric. Indeed the initial conceptual definitions of leadership were from the perspective of a leader.⁽⁵⁾ They centered on the role of the leader's personality, charisma, influence and general behavior.

However, just like in other disciplines, the concept of leadership has evolved throughout time to capture the context of leader and followers. Consequently, contemporary literature examines leadership through multiple dimensions. Among these are dynamics associated with leader emergence, leader-follower relationship and its outcomes, leadership and vision, and distinction between leadership and management. For instance, to articulate the meaning of leadership and the leadership process, Pierce and Newstrom have come up with a conceptual framework that has five key components. These components are the leader, followers, context (situations), leadership process, and the outcomes (resulting by-products).⁽⁶⁾

By way of explanation, a leader is the one who guides performance or activity while followers are people who perform under the guidance of the leader.⁽⁷⁾ Further, context is the situation that surrounds the relationship between a leader and follower, and leadership process is the interplay between the leader, followers and the context.⁽⁸⁾ Viewing leadership as a process is essential because it highlights the fact that leadership is not static.⁽⁹⁾ Finally, outcomes are basically the entire results of the interplay between the leader, followers and context.⁽¹⁰⁾ Examples of outcome include goal attainment, building of trust or respect, quality products, completion of project, customer satisfactory etc.

In this regard, this paper adopts the definition that “leadership is a dynamic and working relationship built over time, involving an exchange between leader and follower in which leadership is a resource embedded in the situation, providing direction for goal (vision) attainment.”⁽¹¹⁾ Essentially, this definition affirms that leadership is a process involving the leader and the led.

The Situation, Key Issues and Impact

In 1969, Muhammad Siyad Barre assumed power through a coup.⁽¹²⁾ For over two decades Siyad Barre ruled Somalia through authoritarianism. This meant that his leadership got so entrenched that when it collapsed a vacuum was created which plunged the country into war, lawlessness and disintegration of Somali society mainly on clan lines and varied interpretations of Islamic and traditional Somali law.⁽¹³⁾

As such, institutions are barely in existence, insecurity and lawlessness have increased in the country especially in the capital Mogadishu. The international community is grappling with the idea of creating some form of leadership that can reconstruct institutions and therefore build Somalia state .

The key issue, immediately after the collapse of the central government, was how to restore order and secure people from criminal activities such as looting, rape and murder. The people also needed to access services such as medical centres, markets and schools. The institutions had collapsed. There was need to create a relatively secure and stable situation. The goal of overcoming anarchy was meant to generate an outcome of peace where people would revert to their normal lifestyles .

In 1991 when President Barre was overthrown, the country was plunged into lawlessness and clan warfare because the clan leaders failed to agree on a replacement.⁽¹⁴⁾ Large populations of people were killed while others were displaced and their normal way of life literally brought to a halt. Criminal gangs emerged to terrorise the people; taking advantage of lack of a government. The warlords continued to control the capital Mogadishu with impunity. The importance of leadership

became clearly evident and people needed to be saved from this situation of anarchy.

So one may ask, how has this state been able to exist without a central government? In this context, it might be erroneous to state that Somalia has been without leadership all through. How come that some form of system akin to a government has existed, in the absence of a government, if not in parallel to transition governments? Fact is that in this state of anarchy some form of leadership emerged as a response .

In conclusion, the preceding discussion has framed the context in which Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed emerged as a leader. The context is a situation in which people find themselves; these situations create needs, and it is the nature of the needs that serves to define the type of leadership needed and thus who will lead. ⁽¹⁵⁾ This conclusion leads to the idea of leadership emergence.

Leader Emergence

It is said that the greatest leaders are visionaries, but no vision is created in a vacuum; it emerges from the situation at hand. ⁽¹⁶⁾ The situation in our case is a state of anarchy occasioned by the collapse of a central government. Therefore Somalis required a leader to offer guidance out of the disorderly situation .

A prominent response to the anarchy was the Islamic Courts Union (ICU). A key founder and leader of the ICU is Mr Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, who later rose to become the President of Somalia until September 2012 when a new government was voted in. Together with other Islamists Ahmed founded the ICU; a judicial system that metamorphosed into a political, military and later terrorist group .

Emergence of Sheikh Ahmed

The emergence of Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed and indeed his organisation the ICU was organic within an extremely non-organized context. In fact a leader emerged from a situation of disorder and lawlessness. One leader who was able to assess the situation and provide a vision which inspired followers; was Sheikh Sharif Ahmed the Chairman of ICU.

Born on 25 July 1964, Sheikh Ahmed is from the Hawiye clan which is one of Somalia's dominant clans in the capital Mogadishu. He studied at Libyan and Sudanese universities in the mid-1980s and returned home to Jowhar in 2002, at a time when a Transition government under Abdulkassim Hassan was trying to establish control of Mogadishu.⁽¹⁷⁾ Mr Ahmed immediately joined his fellow clansman who was a warlord to fight against the government of President Abdulkassim in Jowhar. Here Ahmed became the chairman of the regional Islamic court in Jowhar, but the alliance with the warlord did not last and in 2003 Ahmed fled to Mogadishu.

While in Mogadishu, Ahmed taught at the city's Jubba Secondary School. That same year one of his pupils was kidnapped, amid a wave of abductions in Mogadishu by gangs that demanded ransoms. Ahmed was disturbed by the fact that the kidnapping took place in an area dominated by his own clan.⁽¹⁸⁾ He therefore began campaigning within his local community to establish an Islamic court. The Islamic court managed to secure the release of his pupil and other abductees.⁽¹⁹⁾

Following this success, the ICU shifted a notch higher from informal to a semi-formal structure. The five branches of the Islamic courts united to form the ICU. Among key individual factors that influenced the emergence of Ahmed as the leader of ICU, were cultural issues, his education and personal decision making abilities .

Culturally, he was from a long line of Islamic religious leaders, hence the name 'Sheikh'. In the Arabic language 'Sheikh' means "elder" or "leader" and is used to appoint the front man of a tribe who got this title after his father, or an Islamic scholar who got this title after graduating from Islamic school.⁽²⁰⁾ Ahmed had fulfilled the two conditions and was thus referred to as Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed. His clan was also the most dominant in Mogadishu .

His co-founder, Dahir Aweys would have become the leader because of his age and strong Islamic stand. But Aweys lacked education, while Ahmed was relatively well educated. Similarly, while Aweys advocated for extremism in his decisions, Ahmed tended to focus on the people's needs and hence advocated for the moderate Islamism .

For these reasons, the people tended to identify with Ahmed, who repeatedly opposed terrorism, cruelty against civilians and progressively worked towards stability. A fact that made the United States and the European Union to view him as a “moderate” despite Ahmed’s association with radical Somalia Islamists linked to al-Qaeda. ⁽²¹⁾

Leadership Process

The leadership process is the ongoing relationship between leaders and followers to accomplish a group’s goals.⁽²²⁾ In this leadership process leaders and followers create each other; followers have needs that leaders fulfil.⁽²³⁾ Yet, the context or situation is ever shifting; hence a leader needs to align people to one’s vision.⁽²⁴⁾ This involves communicating the vision to many people in a way that motivates them to participate in accomplishment of the vision or place their trust in the leader. In fact, nowadays the word vision is prominent in the leadership discourse and practice. The need for visionary leaders who can unite people around a unity of purpose and a common direction cannot be gainsaid.

Educated in Libyan and Sudanese universities, Ahmed was not only well prepared as a teacher of geography, Arabic and Religious Education, he was also schooled in Islamic law or ‘Sharia’. Ahmed also spoke English besides Arabic and Somali.⁽²⁵⁾ Together, these competencies would prove useful later when he became the brain and leader of ICU. His ideas shaped the effective responses to the situation of anarchy. Ahmed knew that Somalia is a strongly Islamic country and during the war many Somalis had increasingly turned to their faith for some sort of stability.⁽²⁶⁾ Therefore Islam and its laws became the best means to inspire people and equally provide order .

Basically, in the absence of any functioning state authority as it was at the time in Somalia; traditional leaders, elders, religious leaders, and persons knowledgeable in Islamic and traditional Somali law, took over responsibility for security and survival of the communities in many parts of the country.⁽²⁷⁾ These groups were later represented under the umbrella of the ICU.

The ICU was a judicial system funded by the powerful business community to try and bring some law and order to a country without a government.⁽²⁸⁾ To establish systems, ICU set up eleven autonomous courts in Mogadishu.⁽²⁹⁾ The ICU endeavored to promote Islamic law rather than clan allegiance, which has divided Somalis for long. (30) To avoid division and bias, each sub-clan had its own court to try its own people. A combination of these courts is what formed the ICU under the leadership of Sharif Ahmed.

At first the courts concentrated on petty crime but by the mid-1990s they had progressed into major crimes in north Mogadishu such as robbery, drugs and what they perceived as pornographic films shown in local video houses.⁽³¹⁾ At this stage, despite protests from human rights bodies, north Mogadishu residents were pleased to enjoy law and order; in marked contrast to south Mogadishu, where crime was rampant.⁽³²⁾

The ICU knew what the people needed at the time and put strategies in place to achieve the goal of restoring order. First, the ICU brought together key warring clan factions.⁽³³⁾ Unity of the various stakeholders was paramount for the strengthening of the ICU; hence the Courts co-opted indigenous Islamist movements.⁽³⁴⁾ The ICU proceeded to take the capital Mogadishu, and finally central and southern Somalia. Having forced the warlords who had controlled the capital for years into retreat; the ICU emerged into Somalia's strongest force.⁽³⁵⁾

Motivated by its popularity among people, the IUC system was further expanded into validating transactions such as the purchase of houses and cars.⁽³⁶⁾ They also oversaw weddings and divorces and expanded their authority across most of the capital, while staying out of politics. "They were really trusted by the people, who had no other institution to go to." ⁽³⁷⁾ The ultimate trust with the Somali people had been achieved making ICU the most popular institution in Mogadishu.⁽³⁸⁾

Consequently, Ahmed and others began to combat the rampant crime and banditry in the neighborhoods of north Mogadishu. This was easy because the outcomes of the ICU activities were visible in the Northern parts of Mogadishu where they controlled. Here, there was

order and public services such as security, sanitation, revenue collection and judiciary were functional .

Emerging from this leadership process is the fact that Ahmed possessed leadership qualities that were needed at the time to tackle the situation. His initiative was local and lacked the tag of external sponsorship that had made it hard for other factions to be trusted and followed by Somalis. Ahmed's relevant leadership qualities at the time included being a negotiator, one viewed as a moderate, religious teacher and one focused on unity of various clans. Further the situation within the Somalia context called for a man, as well as one educated both in Islamic laws and formal education. Ahmed fitted in these pre-conceived qualities making his interaction with the followers almost automatic and effective too.

Outcomes:

As the ICU continued to achieve success towards their goal, more responsibilities in terms of increased followership and entry of more actors with different aims emerged. The ICU began to impose a strict version of 'sharia', or Islamic law. Entertainment centres were closed; soccer, cigarettes, alcohol and 'khat' (popular leafy narcotic) were banned. In short, the group started infringing on follower's rights. Similarly, thieves had their limbs amputated and public executions of murderers increased .

In fact the ICU had established some order before they over-did themselves by installing an administration based on an extreme interpretation of the Islamic Law. The goal of the ICU gradually became inconsistent with the initially sought outcome of the people. It was no longer about restoring order; instead political power became a new goal. In the quest for political power, ICU began to force young people into militias to fight against the internationally backed transition government.

⁽³⁹⁾ During their six months in power, the ICU was divided between moderates and hardliners, with Ahmed viewed as the moderate leader.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ The extremists started to have their way. For instance ICU suicide bombers increased, while member Islamic courts of ICU ran terror training camps, recruited foreign fighters, and released videos through al

Qaeda's propaganda arm. The ICU became more confident in their victory and began reviving irredentist nationalism that ironically had been the major cause of the collapse of Siyad Barre's regime. The Courts called for the creation of a "greater Somalia" in the Horn of Africa. "We will leave no stone unturned to integrate our Somali brothers in Kenya and Ethiopia and restore their freedom to live with their ancestors in Somalia." ⁽⁴¹⁾

This prompted Ethiopia to invade Somalia and support the Transition Federal Government (TFG) to dismantle the ICU in 2006. Ahmed surrendered to Kenyan security forces and was briefly imprisoned, but with US intervention Ahmed was released.⁽⁴²⁾ He fled to Yemen and then Saudi Arabia. Later Ahmed teamed with warlord Dahir Aweys to form the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS) a scion of the ICU.

The dynamism and discernment of Ahmed enabled him to realise quickly the importance of negotiations unlike Aweys, who remained rigid to the unrealistic radical wish of defeating Ethiopia. The two leaders split; whereas Ahmed favoured a power-sharing deal with TFG that would restore the Islamists to power, Aweys sought to drive Ethiopian military from Somalia.⁽⁴³⁾ A month later after the resignation of President Abdullahi Yusuf, Ahmed and 150 of his fellow ARS members joined Somalia's newly expanded parliament which elected him president.⁽⁴⁴⁾ This put Ahmed on the other side of the war, now facing former allies in the ICU who had transformed into al-Shabaab militants .

Ahmed's unaccomplished vision as ICU leader seemed to drive him once more now as President of TFG of Somalia. Upon election as president of Somalia, Ahmed stated that he wants to make peace with Ethiopia, recruit Islamist militia fighters into a national security force and rebuild the country's social services.⁽⁴⁵⁾

All in all, Ahmed had led ICU towards its goal of restoring order especially in the capital Mogadishu. The streets were clean, some form of revenue collection took place and crime reduced. The people had developed trust in the group which they saw as the only institution that

they could turn to. However, radicalism, extremism and desire for power derailed the whole process and eventually removed the ICU and its leaders from the people. The ideas that shaped the ICU were now those of al-Qaeda and foreign militants and not Somalia people. So when the Ethiopians and TFG defeated the ICU the people were happy, indicating ICU's loss of trust from followers .

Yet, the change of events took the situation back to the initial state of anarchy. Terrorist attacks increased, more displacements and institutions that had started to take shape collapsed. The fight had taken a new dimension. The former leader of ICU was now in government battling past colleagues who had transformed the ICU objective of stability, to that of extremism and terrorism.

Conclusions:

Certainly the emergence of Ahmed and his ICU group was within a non-organized situation that demanded something to be done to restore order in Somalia. Leadership in this case grew organically. From a personal experience as a teacher who witnessed the kidnapping of one of his students, Ahmed developed his vision to rid society of crime and restore order through some form of institution that people depended on.

A future leader often rises out of a group to present a grievance or to offer a new idea or way of doing things.⁽⁴⁶⁾ The leader may be motivated by personal experience, knowledge or education and the group supports his efforts because they recognize a need to be fulfilled. Ahmed had two levels of experience that motivated him to take leadership. First, he had worked in Johar with his kinsman on running some form of an Islamic court. So when he moved to the capital Mogadishu he was able to found and lead one such court. The personal experience of witnessing one of his students kidnapped motivated him too to fight crime and restore order. He was also educated in Islamic law, widely travelled and possessed a religious pedigree. But perhaps his great strength lay in being moderate as was expected by followers at the time.

A vision is crucial to the leadership process. Ahmed's clear vision of what he wanted to achieve was evident in his statements to the

media where he insisted that his group was only interested in bringing cleanliness and order in the capital and country. As such, he focused his group's attention to this vision through communications in Mosques where he preached, public pronouncements, and in his judgments as a leader of the courts .Building trust with the followers is paramount in the leadership process. The ICU grew to a massive movement simply because the people had identified with their vision. They demonstrated this trust by turning to the ICU to not only solve criminal and commercial cases, but also family issues such as presiding marriages and divorce . Another point about leadership and leadership process is the aspect of self-awareness among leaders. Realistic sense of strength and weakness defines a leader who is able to appreciate that leadership is dynamic.⁽⁴⁷⁾ This dynamism is often influenced by the leadership process which involves the followers and leaders influencing each other within a certain context. Ahmed understood his strengths or weaknesses in every situation that confronted him as a leader. No wonder he was labeled a "moderate" by many people. For example, while his colleagues pushed for a clash with the evidently better armed joint forces of TFG and Ethiopian troops; Ahmed advocated for a retreat at the time. He knew his weaknesses. But it was through this avenue that he became President of Somalia. Similarly, since the situation in the leadership process is ever shifting, leader needs to be flexible and sensitive but focused on the vision. It is argued that "If you examine the rise of a typical leader, the ability to listen and look decreases as power increases."⁽⁴⁸⁾ For instance when the ICU became so popular that more people and regions relied on it as the only institution to bring order, the group became blinded by power and soon engaged in activities such as public executions, amputating and banning entertainment activities. This slowly started alienating it from the people .

Further, a change in goal without communicating to followers can undermine leadership. The ICU lost people's trust when its goal changed to pursuance of political power. If the ICU leadership would have listen deeply and observed the people's needs they would have concentrated on restoring order and not transforming into a political

militia bent on attacking neighboring country so as to have a greater Somalia. This is the reason behind the ICU's fall when Ethiopia vanquished them. Leadership is basically the influence of a leader in achieving shared goals through followers. Similarly, imposed leadership is bound to fail as was the case with Ahmed Sharif when the international community made him the president of the Transition Federal Government of Somalia. In this case the leadership process had not developed organically.

This paper embraces the virtues of leadership definition and explanation based on the observations by Hollander and Julian. They give various perspectives on leadership which include assertions that leadership is a process, an influence relationship, a leader –follower transaction, a differentiated role, an element of the situation in which the follower finds themselves and an exchange relationship. (49) The golden observation that leaders need to act such that others come to believe that their success is due to their own effort and not that of a leader becomes eternal here. (50) To crown all, leaders and the leadership process is well captured by Lao Tzu; “A leader is best when people hardly know he exists, not so good when people obey and acclaim him/her, worse when they despise them. But of a good leader, who talks little, when their task is done, their aim fulfilled, the people will say, we did it ourselves.” (51)

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